

Interview: Legendary Chicago Blackhawks Star Bobby Hull

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 5, 2015 - 3:42pm

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CHICAGO – Robert Marvin “Bobby” Hull needs no introduction in the City of Chicago, as his career as a Chicago Blackhawks hockey player was as iconic and influential as Babe Ruth was to baseball. The “Golden Jet,” which was his nickname, recently appeared at the Hollywood Show in Rosemont, Ill., and still brings admirers that want to meet him, even though he hung up the skates 35 years ago.

His story began in a small town in Ontario, Canada, where he played Junior “B” hockey for the Woodstock Warriors, as a youngster in the 1950s. In 1957, the Chicago Blackhawks took a chance on the then 18 year old Hull, and drafted him into the NHL. Four years later, the “Hawks” won their first Stanley Cup in 28 years, with a team led by Hull – who scored 50 goals that year – Stan Mikita, Pierre Pilote and goalie Glenn Hall.



The 'Golden Jet,' Bobby Hull, at the Hollywood Show, May 3rd, 2015

Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

The "Golden Jet" played ten more years for the Blackhawks, scoring 40-50 goals in seven of those seasons. He made headlines in 1972, when the fledgling World Hockey Association (WHA) took him up on an unprecedented million dollar signing bonus to jump leagues. With no counter offer from the Blackhawks, Hull established himself as a star on yet another team, the Winnipeg Jets, winning two championship cups, and scoring 77 goals during the 1974-75 season. He retired in 1980 as a member of the NHL, as the league absorbed some of the WHA franchises in expansion.

Bobby Hull finished his career with an astounding 913 career goals, and far too many accolades and trophies to count. He was also instrumental in a change to the game's equipment, as he and Blackhawk teammate Stan Mikita popularized the curved "banana blade" on the hockey stick, which have driven goalies to distraction ever since. Hull made the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1983, and then watched his son Brett Hull have as big an influence on the game as he had, leaving the game as third highest scorer in NHL history. And they were the only father-son duo to have more than 50 goals in one season, and over 600 lifetime.

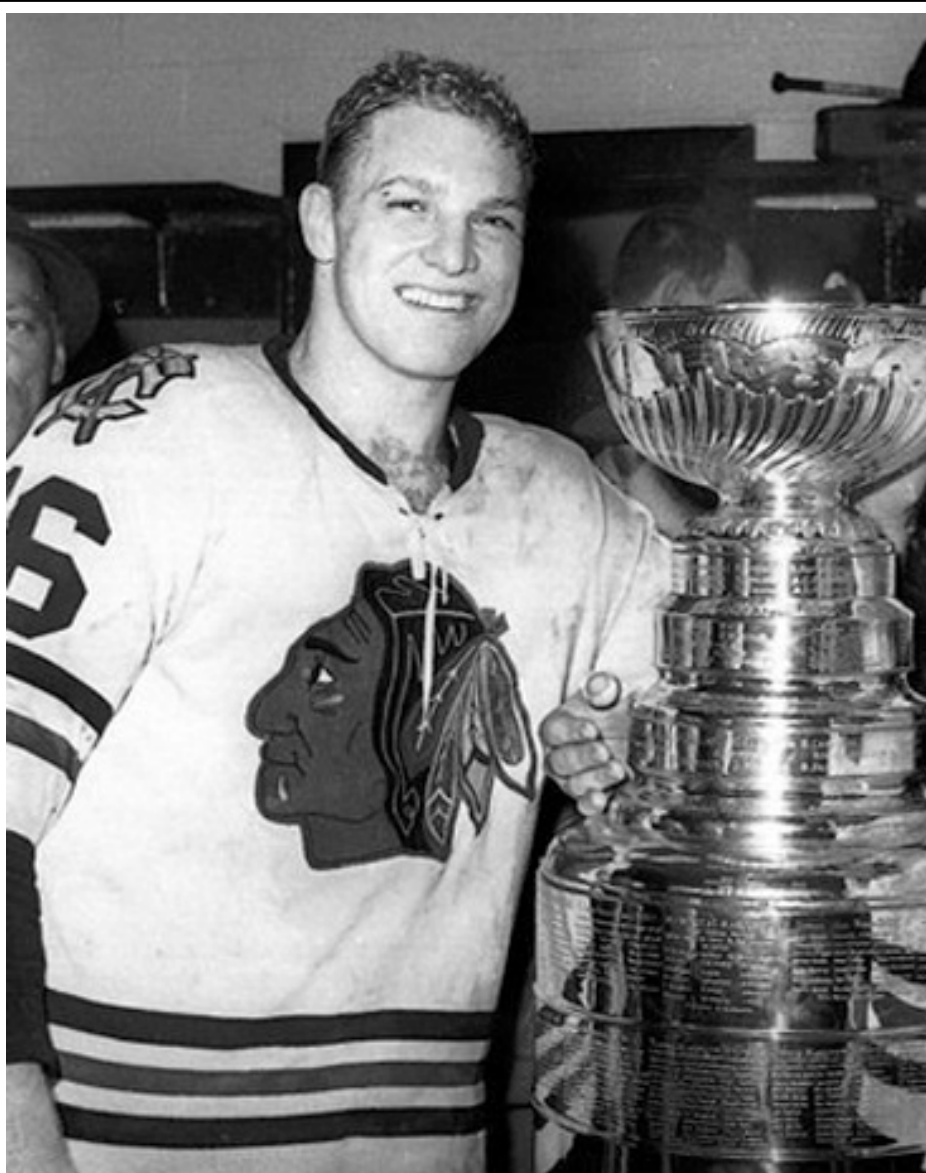
The "Hollywood Show," an event in Rosemont, Ill., that took place on May 1st through 3rd, 2015, and featured TV, movie and sports celebrities signing autographs and meeting admirers. The show also runs in Los Angeles and Las Vegas. HollywoodChicago.com talked to the Bobby Hull, as his beloved Chicago Blackhawks make another run at championship glory during the current Stanley Cup playoffs. Here comes THE "Golden Jet," the mightiest of Blackhawks.

HollywoodChicago.com: What was the most difficult part of the transition from star Canadian junior player to the American city of Chicago and pro hockey when you were 18 years old?

Bobby Hull: I was never a ‘star,’ but had played two years before I joined the Blackhawks for the Ontario Hockey Association, and I ‘only’ had 32 goals in my best year there, so there was more potential to reach. When I came to Chicago in 1957 as a wet-behind-the-ears 18 year old, it was a huge bridge to cross. I’d never been out of Ontario before, and here I was in one of the largest and greatest cities in the United States, and I didn’t know which end was up. It took me two years to realize how the professional game was played, and then the third year I won my first scoring championship, and it was all downhill from there. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: You and the Blackhawks won the Stanley Cup in 1961, an era in which sports - and hockey in America - were not as broadly covered as they are today. Can you give me an example on how low key it was?

Hull: Winning the Stanley Cup meant everything to us, because in those days there was only the ‘Original Six’ [six NHL teams - Chicago, Boston, Toronto, Detroit, Montreal, New York – who played each other for 25 seasons until the NHL expanded in 1967]. We only had to win two series to win the Cup. We did that in 1961, beating the mighty Montreal Canadiens in the preliminary round – ending their streak of five Cups in a row – because our goalie Glenn Hall stood them up on their ear and shut them out twice. We knew once we beat the Canadiens, the Cup was ours.



Bobby Hull with the Stanley Cup, 1961
Photo credit: Chicago Blackhawks

And we won it in Detroit in Game Six. We were presented the Stanley Cup, but there was no carrying it around the ice. We celebrated by having pictures taken on the ice, and then in the dressing room. We got back to Chicago the next day, and we had a big party at Arthur Wirtz’s [Blackhawk owner at the time] hotel, The Bismarck. The champagne flowed that night, in fact, James Norris [another owner] said, ‘I don’t want to see Bobby Hull without a magnum of champagne in his hand for the rest of the night.’ [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: You famously - with Stan ‘The Man’ Mikita - popularized the curved blade in hockey. What do you think of modern sticks, and the technology that creates them?

Hull: I’d like to have used one of them. [laughs] My stick of choice, for my entire career, was the old Northland wooden stick. My son Brett used an aluminum handle with a wood blade, and did pretty well shooting the puck.

HollywoodChicago.com: Yeah, I heard he was pretty good.

Hull: [Laughs] I can’t comment on the titanium sticks, because I never used them, and neither did Brett. But the way the kids shoot the puck now, there is something that comes off them.

HollywoodChicago.com: Everyone who followed the Blackhawks during your switchover to the WHA remembers that moment. What do you think is most misunderstood about your decision in making that transition?

Hull: Bill Wirtz [owner in 1972] tried to tell everyone that I was holding the Blackhawks hostage for a million dollars, which was erroneous as could be. I told the WHA from the beginning that I thought I could get a five year contract from the Blackhawks – I was 32 years old at the time – at 250 thousand dollars a year. Never at any time did I ‘hold them up’ for a million dollar bonus.

So I told the WHA I would leave the Hawks for a million dollar bonus, thinking that if the league folded I would at least take home what the

Winnipeg Jets were offering me, which was the 250 thousand I was asking for from the Blackhawks. The nine franchises in the WHA at the time came up with 110 thousand apiece, I had my million dollar bonus, and that was that. The Jets were the team that held that league together, and we eventually came back to the NHL when we merged with them in 1979.

HollywoodChicago.com: What do you think the sport of hockey had in the 1950s and '60s that today's game cannot imagine, in whatever way you can comment upon?

Hull: Well, as I said, for the first ten years of my career there were only six teams that played against each other. That was supposedly the 120 best players in the world, there was no other standard to compare ourselves against, and the Russians and other countries weren't on the scene yet. We could boast the top 120 players in the world, whether that was correct or not, that's how we felt. And I know with 30 teams now, if you were to break it down to just six teams, you'd have a fabulous bunch of athletes.

So it's great to look back and say it was the 120 best, and to know that all the guys that played on the right wing lines that I knew, all the defensemen I played against, and all the goalies I shot at, are ALL in the Hockey Hall of Fame.

The "Hollywood Show" takes place in Los Angeles, Las Vegas and Chicago. [Click here](#) [21] for details, ticket purchasing information and a list of celebrity appearances.



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Source URL (retrieved on *Mar 29 2024 - 10:50am*):

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